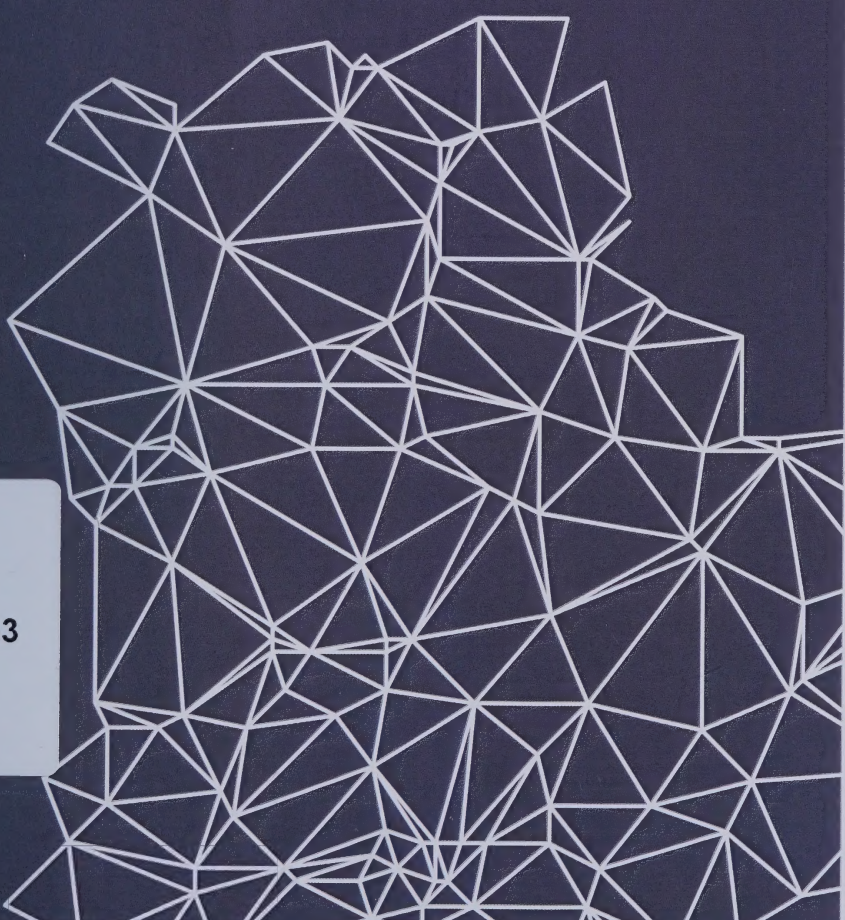


# The Hammer

Student Arts & Literature Magazine  
Central Piedmont Community College  
Spring 2019



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# The Hammer

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# The Hammer

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*9 Plates*  
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# Ode to the Bi-Annual Starbucks Date

Sarah Osborn

& Emma is so good but she doesn't need me anymore,  
won't ride when i'm driving, likes to be behind the wheel so  
leaving is on her terms.

she says it's easy to learn to love black coffee  
when you find out you're lactose intolerant.

you learn to cut your losses, she tells me,  
do whatever keeps you safe.

me & Emma both got voids but she learned quicker  
that filling something empty with more emptiness  
doesn't make it full.

she found what her body couldn't take  
& let it go. she cut the bruise off. she grew back.

i am growing back still.



*Lost in Nature*  
*Lydia Stanley*  
*Silver Gelatin Print*



# Response

Christopher Normile

Like an old corded telephone  
removed from its hook  
I'm listening

Through the sheets and stained glass  
of the windows we use  
I'm listening

With a third eye to see  
and my ears made as deaf  
I'm listening

While the world is ablaze  
and we sit in the dark  
I'm listening

If there's truth in the frame  
but it can't be displayed  
I'm listening

And by the rules we observe  
and discover ourselves  
I'm always listening



*Timothée*  
*Alex Danaï Stamouli*  
*Ink on Paper*

# Flipside

Sarah Osborn

i wake up and take my coffee black. i wake up and bite my tongue.  
i wake up and write the same poem again. something about softness  
and ghosts and what to do when you're not sleeping again.

someone told me that all you have to do to have a different  
nightmare is flip your pillow over when you wake up but  
i think this is as good as they come. it's the one where  
you leave but i didn't hurt you. i didn't hurt you but  
you leave anyway. i didn't hurt you, not this time.

remember the summer where none of us asked questions?  
remember how that all changed? how you read my  
poem and said where does the softness come in and why  
does the ghost knock instead of just appearing?

where does the softness come in? honey, everything is  
soft in the evenings, everything is soft when it isn't a love  
poem. why does the ghost knock instead of just appearing?  
honey, you don't know how to walk through walls.

it doesn't make sense—not the poem, not the disaster  
of my tongue—is it supposed to? who cares. it's  
summer now. you're gone, i'm growing.

i wake up and burn my bedsheets. i wake up and burn that poem. i  
wake up and make my coffee sweeter. i lock the door. i flip the pillow.



*Pink Dress*  
Monique Norris  
*Oil on Canvas*



# Without Title, Without Words, With Pain.

Maryoly Leon

Once more, the night wakes me with painful and sharp howls,  
Rumbling in my ears its decibels to cloud the cochlear acoustics,

To deafen my reason and keep me between  
the thread of madness and sanity.

What is it? Who is it? Who produce these heartbreaking torments?

I did not reach the words to describe how I  
imagine the owners of those entities.

It is inevitable not to wake up.

It is inevitable not to reconcile Reiki while they howl in the dark.

Inside my room, I feel its penumbra,

That overflows the wind and strengthens it with a hazy mist.  
I'm under my blankets and I feel its cold invade my marrow,

And my bones traced from those tremors do not stop chattering,  
And my bleeding, hot marrow burns me like coal on fire.

My joints swell up hurt and make my soul writhe,

As a weak puppet, I feel those threads that want to cut  
it. And my teeth are distemper up to its gums.

And a foetid aroma of blood circulates through my nose. It  
makes a foetid taste of blood in my mouth additionally,  
It is an old flavor, cultivated of many genomes,

Tangled with thousands of origins, circulating to my knowledge.

Those screams try to appease themselves by the two  
feet of those walkers with selective Alzheimer's,

Selective of the convenient origins.

And on my gel bed, my back writhes among the  
pieces of vertebrate memories. And my cramped  
nerves mistreat my tranquility even more.

It hurts to the big toe.

As of cramps those fibromyalgia's by those busy steps of  
the owners of those screams. Screams full of sweat and  
tears for the agony of the fugue of their dreams in lost  
horizons. Horizons sheds of hypocrisy and banality,

That trampling hearts make their brains arid, And  
they are caught by lack of tickets to fly.

Hearts that scratch the cornice of survival  
to supplement conformism,

The one that the plastic royalty throws in leftovers of  
intolerance under the table, And that the irony uses  
them as a cane to increase their greatness and

Spits them on the shoulder of oblivion to their own ancestors  
And blinds them with polished and twisted smiles.

And my eyes fill with salty tears,

Because I see the laments that become seas of lost souls,  
That crawl in recycled waters but without memory.

Souls of different sizes and colors, which lost their  
flavor, because their essence was sucked. And the pieces  
of those souls are swept away by their sweat,

Especially that sweat that springs from sunburn foreheads,

And that they let their neurons disappear because they do not  
have gold in their pockets To buy their education and reach  
those sweet dreams of conquering the world together.

Oh, those screams do not let me sleep anymore because they become  
nightmares. I see many souls lost without a fine pillow to rest.

Without a pillow to listen to their hopes,  
Without their own land to take root,

With taken away memories,  
Without rights allowed to fully supplement,

Because the evaporated supplications can cover  
themselves with that basic sustenance of comfort.

Sad souls, not big enough to value,

With so much essence to explode and fill other pockets.

As a coven of little birds without colors, who chant as  
zombies without stopping, Their little feathers fall into  
pieces in the golden cage that curtail them off.

Fairies without wings, caged. Angels without crucified halos.  
I cannot take those deafening wailings.

And the dawn gives me again a little more filling to the dark circles.

I will understand the injustice of so many cries and as anvil-heavy  
on this trip, In this time that does not belong only to me.

A journal that belongs to all those who have DNA.

Only the one who comes from another planet can  
free itself of these genomes But this journal is  
relegated on the shoulders of combat heroes

That it accepts the multicellular human blood.

-Marliant-





*Take Flight in the Sorrowful Night*  
Celia Aleciana Elias  
Relief Print



*Wonderboy*  
*Tucker Fraetis*  
*Oil on Canvas*

# Profiling at the Parade

Miranda Maynor

As a young child I often did not question those in charge. I respected authority and did as I was told. There are many examples of those with authority going out of their way to help others. Unfortunately, there are also many examples of authority figures going out of their way to harass people. I was of the perspective that the majority of authority figures were to be trusted. This perspective changed in the third grade when I had my first encounter with a major authority figure, namely the police. This encounter fundamentally transformed the way I would view and act around authority in the future.

It was the day of the Marin Elementary School Halloween parade. I, along with the rest of my third grade class, was frantically trying to get into costume.

“You dressed up this time?” Lucie, my best friend in the class, questioned.

I nodded my head. “Yep,” I replied. “My dad helped me with the costume.” I pointed to the belt of stars that had been painted onto my black t-shirt.

She frowned. “What are you going as?”

“I’m the constellation Orion,” I responded, proudly holding up the shield and sword my father had made out of cardboard. “He said I would be the star of the show!”

Lucie groaned at my Dad’s nerdy joke. “We better get in line before the parade starts.”

We strolled down the street showing off our costumes to the horde of parents clamoring to get that perfect picture of their

kid. I desperately looked at the faces of the crowd as we passed by, looking for my Dad's supportive smile. He was nowhere to be seen.

"I can't find my Dad. I bet he's late again," I shouted.

Lucie shook her head and pointed. "He's right there." My eyes followed the trajectory of her finger, and sure enough he was there, one brown face in a sea of pale ones.

He was engaged in a conversation with a few of the town's police officers, all of whom were gripping the tops of their gun holsters.

Lucie leaned over to me. "Did your dad do something?"

"I don't think so," I replied as I watched the parents in the vicinity give my father the side eye. "I'm going to go see what's happening," I shouted while I fought my way through the army of school children and parents.

I was not within ten feet of him when one of the officers blocked my path.

"Hi honey," he greeted me.

"Excuse me," I squeaked, attempting to go around him. He jumped in front of me again.

"Sorry," he said as he bent down. "You can't be over here. Why don't you go back and find your parents?"

I let out a sigh of exasperation. "That is my parent!" I screeched, my pointer finger extending in the direction of my father. The officer let out a laugh that was cut short when he saw my deadpan expression.

He made his way back over to his fellow law enforcement officers. They huddled for five minutes and proceeded to walk to the principal's office with my father in tow. I sunk down on to the bench outside the office, frazzled. When my father finally emerged, he took me home and explained the events of the day.

The principal at my school, my father informed me, was worried that a father of one of the other students would violate a restraining order, taken out by his wife, by showing up at the Halloween parade. The father was Latino and therefore brown like my dad. When the principal saw a brown man in the crowd, she had assumed he



was the father in question and did not stop to consider that there may be other fathers who were people of color. When the police confronted my father, they also assumed he was the violator of the restraining order. After he had proved his identity, that should have been the end of it, but it was not. The police took the opportunity to ask him accusatory questions without cause. He had remained calm and polite the entire time, but when the police ran his driver's license to check for a previous criminal record, he asserted his rights which made them more hostile. My father said he probably would have gotten arrested, but the principal had shown up in the nick of time to apologize to him as she realized her error.

Once he was done with his narrative, he sat down next to me. "Esme," he said, his voice serious in tone. "When you are a person of color in this country, the police consider you guilty until proven innocent and are always looking for evidence for the crime they assumed you committed. Even if you are the one that called them for help, they'll still treat you like a criminal. Take today for example; it didn't matter that I was dressed nicely, acted respectfully and was not even the person they were looking for. The police still ran my license."

"Isn't there anything you can do though?" I asked.

His head drooped. "This country is quickly becoming a police state as they take our rights away in the name of security from boogey men of their own creation. Whenever you interact with the police, don't give them cause to treat you like one of the boogey men. Don't make any sudden movements, always tell them what you are about to do before you do it, and if they ask any questions, you tell them that you are invoking your 4th, 5th and 6th amendment rights and that you need an attorney." He stood up, gave me a hug good night and trudged into his bedroom. He did not realize it, but what he had said would forever change the way I thought about, and interacted with, the police.



*The Corner Chair*  
Deborah Wandzilak  
Oil on Canvas

# Pupa

Parker Vick

*Saturday November 19, 2016*

Today, God blessed me. That's the most accurate statement I can try to make; for what defines one day's blessings from another? In the end, all blessings amount to a sum. They do not come chronologically, because God knows no order of events. What he does know, is a single purpose or outcome of those blessings. A reason. A product. A plan. One that I totally do not understand. I guess that's the beauty of God, you try to take it one day at a time, trying to fit the pieces together in the massive puzzle of life. Why did he do this? Why did he let it happen now? Only Lord knows, goes the saying. But what if we did know? What if, we understood God's reasoning for what he does? Life would be easier, right? Wrong. Life would be meaningless. Without the experiences we have to learn and grow, with all the answers, life would be dull, impassionate, and without purpose. A near death experience brings questions of the meaning and purpose of one's life accompanied by the desire to live and find out. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it sure made life interesting. So, do I ask questions about blessings I receive? Of course, I do. Yet, I never cease to trust the plan.

As I write this, I'm sitting in a prison cell looking at a picture of my brother, my dad, and myself. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but this one is invaluable; it has saved my life on so many hard nights. I see the happiness on all our faces and try to remember what I felt like that day. I can't. It bothers me. It's just one example of a moment that I truly did not understand how lucky I was to be with my family. But, boy do I know now. It's been almost two years since I've been home with them. My relationship with my family is pretty dynamic in the sense that it's changed so much. Maybe, it hasn't really changed; maybe it's always been this great, but I never realized because I was just too damn high to see how good I really had it. I know it's a statement that's hard to believe, but there wasn't really a "sober me" after the age of twelve, as my family can attest. You can ask any of them how deep it went. Coming from meager beginnings, I grew up with a single mom raising me and my brother.

Luckily, she met my stepdad. After that, we were well off which meant that I always managed a way to find my fix. I made it happen, every day. I thought life was good as long as I never came down. If I had a problem, I got high. Fighting with my parents? Smoke a blunt. Failing a class? Oh well, might as well stop going completely. It was so bad that when I did go, I'd drink by myself before school so I could sleep through it. There was always a pill for something. Stressed? Find some Xanax. Sad? Take oxycontin. It was endless. By the time I was fifteen I would only go to enough classes to pass, and I'd be drunk in the morning throughout the afternoon. I overdosed on sleeping medicine and had a heartbeat so slow I nearly died because I was too stressed to do my senior exit project. Every morning I'd drive my car past school to an empty parking lot somewhere, anywhere, that I could get high without being bothered. I would binge and sleep for days without seeing or speaking to my family. Eventually the harder drugs like coke and molly became an everyday thing. I was making cocktails of any drug I could find, hoping I'd die, but I can remember numerous times thinking, I wouldn't mind.

I was lonely mixed with an addictive personality, which was my death wish. I knew what it meant for me. I'd seen it so many times. I had no friends, but I had drug dealers. I realized that one morning when I woke up and had no idea where I was. I had thrown up on myself and fell asleep in it on someone's floor. I looked around and saw strangers skewed about the room also blacked out on the floor. I had no idea who these people were, no matter how hard I tried to remember. They could have been dead for all I know, junkies with needles hanging out of their arms can't really be classified as "living", maybe just "existing." All I knew was I left that morning with a violent realization of who I was. An overwhelming weight of shame came crashing down on my shoulders. I was seventeen then and couldn't remember the last time I had been home, so I went there. That night I sat at the dinner table with my family. They are all normal, hard-working, respectable people. Their love was and is unconditional for me. They still accepted me for who I was; and guess what? I had rejected them. I hated myself for it. I had pushed myself so far away from my family that I didn't know the people I was sitting down with, the ones I shared blood with. Not to mention, I have the most patient stepdad of all time. I was amazed he hadn't disowned me yet. All this thinking was too much. I pushed my chair under the table, cleared my plate, and left to get high.

This was who I was, what I did, and how I thought. I never really knew who I was supposed to be. I tried a lot just to fit in. Sports wasn't really for me because I was too small and unathletic. I wasn't



smart so I never applied myself in school. I didn't ever find my place, so I tried to make one. I threw a lot of parties at my parents' house when they weren't home. I'd invite everyone and spend my own money on them. A lot of people would show up and gladly trash the house my loving parents provided for me. I thought, I finally made it. I remember my naïve mind saying to myself, I could do this forever. I was so delusional! But after so many parties I began to realize that my "friends" at my parties were not my "friends" anywhere else. Sure, I had a big, secluded house where people could come over to have fun. But did I ever go over to their houses or get invited anywhere with them? Of course not. So, I saw that crowd of people for what they really were--leeches. As my senior year began to near the end, I soon realized that everyone else would be leaving to go to college while I was stuck here. I began making friends with losers who were also trapped in the lifestyle of doing nothing. I became someone I thought I had to be. Long story short, I ended up in prison. Here I am. Lo and behold. While in prison, I learned more about myself in these two years than I had in the eighteen that I was a free man. I learned that blessings come in many forms. Coming to a place like this gave me the opportunity to get sober for the first time in six years. It helped me discover God. It showed me just how much I love my family. All in a prison cell.

*Thursday March 21, 2019*

It has been two years since my release. Today I am a normal college student. Broke, tired, and seriously, very broke. There is one thing I am extremely rich in, and that is gratitude for the life I've been given. Yes, I face obstacles daily that the normal twenty-two-year-old wouldn't. However, I've chosen to stop giving people power over me. I manifest my own destiny. I don't need to fit in, because I am my own best friend, my own best advocate. I've learned that those kinds of mindsets are what attract people to you. Loneliness, self-destructive habits, and negativity are all traits that people choose to bring into their own lives. Today, I am a healthy adult who has an internship with a great company that I am blessed to work with. I no longer do any drugs, or even smoke cigarettes. I choose to have a good day every morning. I work out daily with a group of genuine friends who like me for me, and not the pills in my medicine cabinet. My family and I have never had a stronger relationship. You see, butterflies are beautiful because of their evolution. No one refers to the larva as beautiful, but that same creature gets so much appreciation when it matures. That's what makes a butterfly magnificent. The jumpsuit was my chrysalis, and this is my metamorphosis.



*Tea Leaf Ladle*  
*Kathleen Tomlinson*  
*Copper*

# In Living Color

Imani Russell

*Marcus*

The rumble of laughter that belches out of him isn't real, it's familiar. Familiar to him and to the faded figures that surround him. He is like a drop of red blood in the deepest blue sea; all it can do is disperse to then later disappear. His laugh mixes the same way with the five laughs that entrap him, but his mind is settled away from the vibrations that ring in his gut. Instead, his mind is on the music that rings in his ears: a mix of classical and jazz. He knows that Courtney, his assistant, wanted a bit of rap music for the office party and that Dylan, his boss, wanted pop, so the partners decided to disregard all requests and go with music that no one could hate, but no one could love either. That was what brought a real smile to Marcus' sculpted face, not whatever joke had been told.

He has become more convincing, acting as if it is the jokes that make him laugh. His coworkers believe it, too. His mama didn't pay for the dentist, orthodontist, and doctor to have anything less than the perfect smile, the kind that brightens the day and warms the heart. His physique follows this pattern, body built up so there is something to fill his pressed blue suit with, hands moisturized so others may desire his touch. No one in this office has ever seen Marcus slouch, at least not while he is at work. He wonders, still, if they can calculate when he will laugh or when he will smile like his mind is coded; he wonders if they know he is not as "real" as he says he is. Hannah's apple-red lips are spilling out words, one after another, and Marcus watches them move, wondering what story he had missed out on.

"I just don't get waiting ten minutes to get a cup of coffee. I have been getting my drinks from the very same shop, every day for the last seven years. At this point, I should just be able to walk in, go behind the counter, and make the coffee myself," Hannah says.

Marcus doesn't like coffee.  
Marcus drinks tea.  
Marcus doesn't go out to buy tea.  
Marcus makes his own.

Despite not having a point of reference, he can see the amusement in that, the scenario of Hannah going behind the counter as if she works there. Understanding this part makes his smile look more genuine.

He looks down at the untouched glass of red wine that was handed to him by a wayward coworker in accounting and he wonders how long he must wait before inevitably setting it down untouched without being noticed. Looking up, Marcus guesses he will do so as soon as the people surrounding him finish off their own glasses. He will let them believe, for a little while longer, that he is having as much fun as they are, even if his eyes do drift to his Rolex watch every once in a while.

"Oh, Mark," Courtney starts.

It's Marcus. He will never understand why Courtney—or the others—say his name this way, but he also feels no need to correct them.

"Remember that retreat last year when Gabe...?"

He laughs before the punchline, making sure these people know just how funny the story should be in case his false enthusiasm fails him. He copies the arches their mouths make when they speak, mimics the amusement soaked in the words they say, and even replicates the rhythmic dance of light-heartedness they put on. He is one of them. He becomes them, as best he can.

*Anthony*

"They said they got a call. I don't know why I didn't get a call, but they did. We weren't even fighting. Jayla and I were just talkin' real loud, and then the police were at our doorstep. Man, what kind of bullshit is that? Anyway, they fined us, like that means shit, and now all I wanna know is which one of these..." Ray, his token drunk friend, points the tip of his glass beer bottle out into the crowd of moving bodies that pay him nor their little park bench any mind. "...fake ass neighbors I gotta cut."

The event his friend described was not funny. Nothing about those events are humorous, but Anthony laughs at it anyway. The other three people sitting on the old picnic bench chuckle as well, clinking bottles and bumping shoulders. The chuckles didn't come from the predicament itself, but rather from understanding what that predicament felt like first-hand. They came from finding comfort in the fact that they're not the only ones who know the pain.

The laugh that rolls its way out of Anthony is one of relief.

"Man!" Anthony hollers over the music that fills the park, his voice dulled only by the rapidly moving, dancing, eating, talking bodies that fill the space and filter it. "I bet it was Tony who called 'em! He ain't come to the last gathering in this neighborhood! Starting to think he just don't like us!"

Ray leans forward and searches for Tony in the crowd. Tony was sitting at another table with fries and a bright blue can of Pepsi clasped in his hands as he argues with his wife. Anthony, Ray, and the others watch and wait for him to look their way. Tony casually glances up, his gaze falling back down once his eyes met theirs. When his gaze drops, they smile as if they have just won a prize, as if Tony will back off after this, as if Ray didn't lose his paycheck because of that fine.

Anthony sometimes thinks another reason he laughs is because the decisions that he makes—to stare at Tony, to validate his friend—can't alter the path of his life for once.

Walking into the neighborhood barbeque was the easiest part of being there. The louder the music, the more Anthony's brain caves in on itself. This feeling was not what he wanted when he left the house and crept so stealthily into the night. In fact, it was the opposite of the sort of drunken, social chaos of a party that this neighborhood usually guaranteed; the sort of drunken, social chaos of a party being all that keeps him sane.

This sort of drunken, social chaos of a party had him thinking about how much his neighbors look like him. Even though Tony and Anthony have different traits, they both wear the same outdated tennis shoes and large-cut jeans. Even though Ray and Anthony have different relationships with their wives, they both have T-shirts and loose, black jackets around their shoulders. Anthony must think the only way he can distinguish himself from the others is that his baseball cap is tilted sideways.



Anthony doesn't let the smell of charcoal, lighter fluid, and fresh beef patties slapping down on old grills mixing with the belly-laugh of large, sweaty men deter him from muttering, "I should probably get home soon before my wife thinks I got a second job." Now, it's their turn to laugh at his expense, and he's somewhat gleeful of how good it still feels the other way around. The laughter means that he isn't alone. Standing up, Anthony checks his phone and tries to see through the screen's cracks what time it is. It's nine fifty-one. He finishes off his Bud Light, slaps hands with a few more friends, and makes his way home.

### *Marcus*

Marcus slams his car door whenever he enters the driver's seat, making sure there is a ringing left after it closes, a vibration, a something to fill the air that has been void of sound, and therefore joy. He sits there alone, empty and wanting. Marcus stares through his windshield and into the office building where Courtney and Dylan are still talking and laughing. He wonders what unfunny joke they are making. A part of him wants to go back in there and give a fake laugh to it.

Instead, he puts his head down on the steering wheel and tries to find solace in the fading ring, glad the world hasn't left him in total silence just yet. A few deep breaths later, he starts the engine and backs out of the parking space.

### *Anthony*

Anthony doesn't live very far from the park, but his aching feet have been moving for too long to make the walk easy. The roads in their neighborhood are cracked and uneven so the old sneakers he wears, combining with the broken concrete, do his feet no favors. As the silence comes, he wishes it was gone. He wishes the sound of the party was back in his ear nagging him about his wife and their financial situation. He wishes there were more people and more alcohol to drown out his own problems, make him feel like it isn't only up to him to fix any of it.

He can see the light downstairs in their living room and he stops just a few meters outside of his and his wife's apartment complex.

His stomach twists at the thought of going home and the reality that waits patiently for his arrival. His lips are really itching for one more drink.

*Marcus*

"Marcus, baby! How was work?"

The voice comes from the living room and the minute Marcus enters it, his wife, April, lets her hair fall and cascade down her shoulders as if she needs him to know that her hair can do this. He smiles at her lovingly and holds his arms open for her to fill. April slid into his embrace, her mouth fitting with his soon after.

He finds himself calm here. The silence that fills his own home is not as harrowing as the silence in the outside world. Marcus shrugs.

"It was fine," he says. Work for him was always "just fine" and, by now, she knows to just expect that. "What were you reading?" he asks, pointing towards the book she discarded by the couch.

"Oh," April let him go and bent over to pick it up. In that split second when she's bent over, Marcus thinks about her. He tends, naturally, to think about people when their backs are turned. In this moment, seeing her like that, Marcus wonders if she knows just how much he loves her. Her sweet personality doesn't match her look, too often found in sweatpants on the couch with her hair up, only letting it down when she knows Marcus is coming home. Her calves were strong enough to break a wooden board, he had set it as fact in his mind. But her eyes told her real story. Even though he couldn't see them now, Marcus knew April's green eyes held all the parts of her that he had fallen in love with. The moment ends quickly, and she's back up and telling him about the book. "It's by a man named Richard Harr. It talks about a woman who's in prison for murdering her husband and it keeps flashing back to why she did it."

"Ouch, is there something you want to tell me?" Marcus asks with a bit of playfulness in his tone, wrapping her in his arms again and she breaks out into a smile, one that reaches her eyes before the joy can even stretch out her lips.

"Possibly...if you keep leaving your dirty socks all over the house." She gives him a quick peck on the nose and breaks out of his grip. "I'm heading to bed now that you're home," she informs him, and the conversation is almost over.

"Oh," April turns around on the staircase to speak. "By the way, your comb broke so I went out and bought you a new one."

An object is tossed in his direction and he has to brace himself twice. Once, to catch it in time and twice, to comprehend what the object is.

It is a rake comb, the kind that most people find in travel pouches and grooming kits. The kind that's usually black or navy blue and the word "Goody" in gold lettering along the spine, the teeth on one end spread slightly further apart than the teeth on the other. The problem: Marcus never had a rake comb.

He had a pick comb.

His eyes glaze up to his wife's and now her blinding—perhaps just blind—smile worries him.

"Thank you," comes out of his mouth before he has a chance to question it and she answers, "You're welcome," before walking up the stairs. He looks at the comb and thinks that he'll exchange it for the correct one in the morning. For now, he kicks his shoes off and doesn't think about how awkward it will be returning his fourth comb at that store as he heads to bed.

*Anthony*

"So, you just don't check your phone anymore, is that it?"

He wonders when he and his wife stopped greeting one another when they walk through the door. Anthony figures it was about a month after they had gotten married and he brought that stray dog home. His wife, Shatice, hadn't felt the need for formalities then and instead went straight to, "What the hell is a dog doing in here?" He figured there is no longer a need for obligatory pleasantries.

"I'm sorry. Mike brought some beer and I hadn't seen..." Shatice interrupts him to plant her lips on his as if he wouldn't have planted his on hers as soon as he was done speaking. "...Shine in a long time and all she wanted to do was talk about her new job. I'm sorry. I should've called."

"Yeah, you should have," Shatice says. "If Shine gets in your eye one more time, I might have to turn her little light off."

The words are stern, but the smile that plants itself on her lips say nothing of the sort. Shatice has a closed-mouth smile like she doesn't want people to know when she is happy. She likes to, instead, spring her happiness on others whether they want

it or not. She wears colorful and flowing clothes, but she has an attitude. She has an attitude, but she loves to make people smile. Her braids are usually tucked so tight up on her head that people think a stick up her ass has made it so, but Anthony knows that's not the case. Maybe it was her duality that made Anthony fall in love with her. He just then realizes that he is holding onto her hand; a passing gesture. He doesn't know how much it stabilizes him until she takes it back and adds, "I found a job."

Anthony's smile falters as her own rises. Moments like those never last long enough, moments where they can just be sarcastic and make puns about things that don't matter, will never matter—like Shine and her new job. Anthony's smile shouldn't be lowering at this point, it should be rising. This was relatable with both of them having low-paying jobs; this was one of those moments meant to be laughed at.

However, it felt a little too real to laugh at.

"You know that electric company that's settin' up a huge buildin' down the street?" Shatice continues to explain. Anthony nods along to his wife's bright brown eyes. "They need workers down there and, even though I don't even know how to change the damn lightbulb on the porch, they got a quota to fill by the end of the year and I think I can charm them well enough."

That was what made Anthony's stomach twist into knots, pulling his head left and right in protest. The next time he grabs her hand is not to comfort, but to confront.

"No, I don't want you faking your way to a paycheck. What's wrong with the job you have now?" Anthony asks.

Shatice's hand goes stiff in his, her expression following suit. "My job now won't keep the lights on or the water running, and neither will yours. This isn't about pride, Anthony, it's about money. We need it," she says.

Anthony knows that. Sometimes he thinks he knows that better than anybody else. Anthony and his neighbors can laugh and "relate" together all they want, but that doesn't make them the same. Just because the vase sits next to the T.V. doesn't make it a form of entertainment, just because their houses sit next to his doesn't mean theirs hold the same problems. The bottom line is that none of those people experience what he's going through, not even his

wife. She could live in this house with him, they could eat the same food, and they could both go to work every day...but she could never know the sort of pain Anthony would feel seeing her sit up straight where she usually slouches, put on a smile when she would usually frown, and ruin those pretty little lips with those ugly little lies.

Anthony shakes his head to confirm it. “No,” he starts. “I will get another job to keep up with the payments. Hell, I’ll get two if that’s what it takes...but I won’t let you be fake for those assholes, not when I know who you really are.”

There is a pause before she hugs him and Anthony wonders, even after she backs away, what that pause meant.

“I won’t,” she tells him and nothing more, not even her usual spell about how moving up doesn’t always correlate to selling out. She is just silent.

Anthony watches her walk to their room and sighs, wondering relentlessly, and maybe hopelessly, just what that pause had meant.

#### *Marcus and Anthony*

Marcus imagines what this house would look like in black and white. He knows people back then didn’t physically see the world like that, but he figures there was some sort of colorless undertone in that time period. With all the unfiltered hate back then, there had to be. So, standing in front of the house with all these people surrounding him makes him wonder if he—and all of the other visitors—should not be seeing this house in living color.

The brown pillars accentuate the yellow tint of the foundation, skinny windows hiding stories behind their curtains.

Anthony stands just outside of the crowd, afraid of pushing too far in and getting lost in the sound of pictures being taken and mothers and fathers telling their sons and daughters all that this man did for their race. He eventually makes his way towards the entrance of Martin Luther King Jr.’s childhood home, hoping the influx of people on this holiday won’t stifle his ability to get a ticket inside. His shoulder slides against a taller man standing in front of the entrance and they briefly make eye contact.

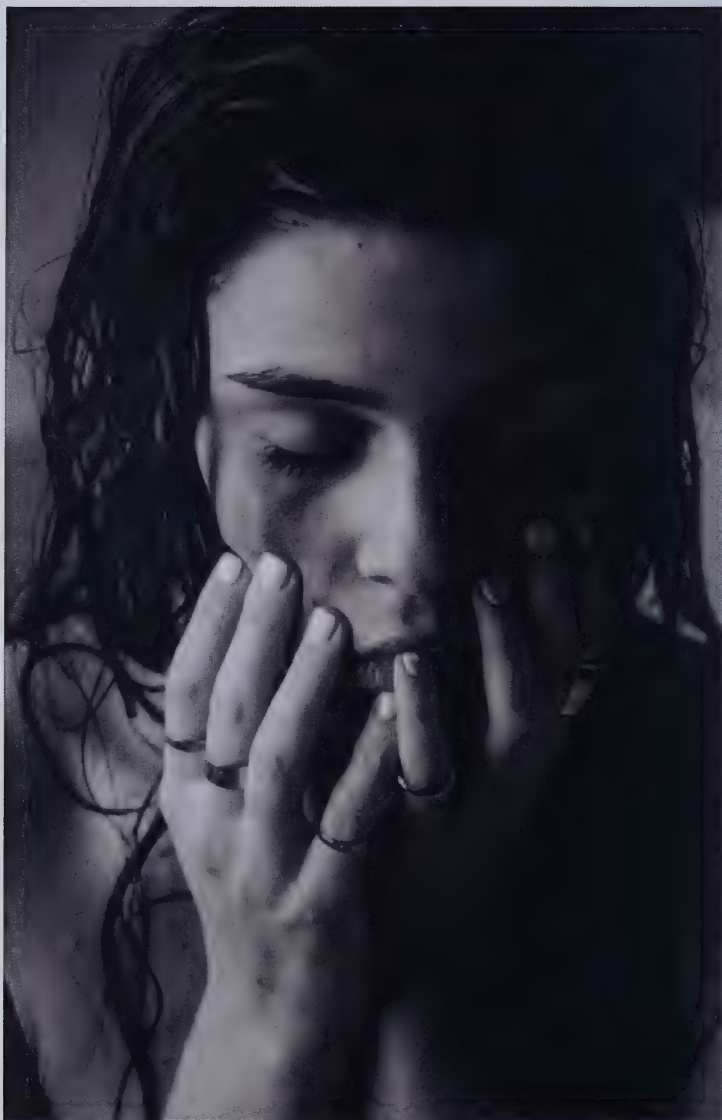


Marcus stares at the man that bumped into him for a moment, taking in his shoes, his clothes, his color, before turning back around as the line moves.

Anthony looks at Marcus' coat and shoes from behind him, the line still shuffling forward.

"Bum," Marcus wishes to mutter.

"Sellout," Anthony wants to say.



*Alone*  
*Kevon Martin*  
*Digital Photograph*



*Burn Out*  
*Tanner Sebren*  
*Digital Photograph*



*Lone Tree*  
*Elijah Jackson*  
*Digital Photograph*

# Left or Right?

Anna Graham

*This is a reminder of Andrew Brown's upcoming LorR placement test. LorR Testing will take place at the LorR Testing Facility for all children born on August 2nd, 2093. Testing will begin at 7 a.m. Please bring all of your child's identification.*

*Thank you for your contribution to our society.*

The notification came. I make note of the time to arrive and place the tablet back on the counter with a shaking hand. I frown, contemplating my hand. Why is it shaking? I take a deep breath, baffled by my body's reaction. I should check my blood sugar levels, perhaps that is why. Or lack of sleep; the shaking a simple natural reaction to staying up late last night to finish the experiment. Consequently, I did not receive the nine hours of sleep required for optimum function.

I squeeze my toes into the plush white carpet as I pad to my closet. Tapping my request into the wall panel, I select my clothing for the day. With a quiet swish, the closet door opens, revealing a perfectly-pressed grey pantsuit and nude heels. A completely appropriate outfit for a chemist.

Dressed, I walk from my bedroom to Andrew's. I politely tap on the door.

"Andrew, I am sure you have not forgotten that your birthday is today, and therefore the day of your LorR test. Please dress and then go to the kitchen for breakfast. We must be there by seven and it is now five-eighteen."

"Ok, Mom! Don't worry, I'm almost dressed!"  
Andrew calls from behind his door.



I nod, satisfied I have ensured that he will not be late. Again. I do not know why he cannot seem to wake himself properly in the mornings, or adhere to his schedule. Hopefully as he ages he will mature in this regard. If he is even given a chance, after today's testing.

Why would I even think such a thing? Of course, Andrew will be fine. He is most certainly a Left. I am, and so was his father. It is statistically highly unlikely for a child of Left parents to be a Right. It is the whole principle that established the law of not allowing Rights to have children, so that they do not continue to propagate? useless members of society.

I tap in the breakfast order into the kitchen's hologram panel. Two MealComplete drinks, one with the vitamins and protein specialized for my nutrition needs, and another specialized for Andrew. I chose the berry flavor for Andrew, knowing it is his favorite.

The kitchen's program finishes preparing the MealComplete drinks, and I sit down to consume my morning meal. Almost done, I gaze down the hallway, where Andrew has yet to appear. I sigh and rise from my chair.

"Andrew?" I question, walking down the hall to his room. I arrive at his door, and knock again. "It is imperative that you are not late today. You must have breakfast to ensure your energy for the day."

"I don't want to go!"

I blink, my mind taking a moment to process Andrew's statement. He, he does not want to go? To be tested? Why would he say such a thing? Is he nervous? How ridiculous!

"Andrew, testing is a mandatory part of your growth as a member of society. It simply does not matter if you wish to go or not, you must. Now stop this ridiculousness and come eat."

"No! You can't make me! I'm not gonna go to that place!"

A feeling of unease curls up inside me. I tap in the code to unlock his bedroom door, and enter his room. His bed is not made, as usual, nor is the room as tidy as it should be. A tuft of fuzzy hair lets me know that Andrew is hiding under the covers.

"Andrew..." His bed sinks in slightly as I sit on the corner of it. "Why do you not want to go?"

“Cause, they’ll find out that I’m a Right! I know I’m one, Momma, I just know it. And then I’ll have to leave you!”

Momma? ‘Cause? He has known that it has not been acceptable to use such primitive vocabulary since he was three.

My throat tightens. “That is highly unlikely, Andrew. Both your parents are Lefts, and the statistics-”

“Like those matter! I know myself better than some stupid statistics. Besides, it’s only 94 percent chance that I’ll be a Left!” Under the covers, Andrew hits the bed in frustration. “My brain is useless! Only good for those dumb things like music and painting. I am worthless to society!”

“Andrew, I do not know how to calm you from your irrational anxiety.”

Andrew flings the covers off and lifts his head, his 7-year-old eyes boring into mine.

“It is not irrational. And if you were willing to admit that your kid was a worthless screw-up, you’d not want me to go too. Unless you’re just happy to finally be able to get rid of me.”

“Of course not, Andrew!” Something in my chest swells, and I wrap him in my arms.

“I promise you Andrew, you will be fine. You will take the test, and they will conclude that you are a Left, just like me. And just like your father was. Alright?”

Andrew snuffles, burying his head into my shoulder. “O-ok.”

“What if you eat just fruit for breakfast? The sweet plums you love?”

“Can I really? You only let me have plums if they’re blended into a protein smoothie to save time. That’s not our normal breakfast, will you really-”

“Yes, you can.” I interrupt. “However, you must get dressed first.”

“Ok!” Andrew leaps off the bed and hurries over to his closet.

I rise from the bed, and leave to prepare him a new meal.

Andrew beside me, the elevator descends to the bottom floor of our apartment complex.

“Have a productive day!” the automated voice announces as the elevator arrives at the bottom floor.

I step out of the elevator, and Andrew follows. He looks like a proper young man in his pressed navy shirt and pants. So why does my chest still feel this way?

The hover-shuttle stop is only a short walk away from the apartment complex, and we arrive right on time. I help Andrew get on the hover-shuttle, his short legs making it more challenging for him to step onto it.

Andrew rushes for a window seat, and gazes happily out the window, watching the blur of buildings, people, and other hover-shuttles.

I sit next to him, my head aching. I cannot find a place for my hands to settle.

“Look at all the birds Mom! Aren’t they pretty? It looks like they’re dancing in the air!” Wide-eyed, Andrew points happily to the flock of passing birds.

A man sitting next to us huffs, while several other passengers glare at Andrew and me.

“I do see them, Andrew. Sit down properly now.”

“Aw! Okay Mom.”

Has Andrew always shown these improper traits? Have I simply been in denial this entire time? My mind plays over every moment with Andrew. How he is not tidy enough. How he tends to be late. How he is constantly absent minded.

My thoughts continue to spiral into further worries. Have I done him a disservice by not reprimanding him when he has exaggerated tales of his daily events? Or by allowing him to hum to himself, since I did not find it distracting?

I always thought it was harmless, but what if I was enabling Right brained characteristics?

“Arriving at the LorR Testing Facility,” the automatic voice announces, the hover-shuttle coming to a stop.

“Come along Andrew, this is our destination.”

Andrew follows me away from our seats and out of the hover-shuttle. A gathering of children Andrew’s age and their guardians waits at the entrance to City Hall.

I head for the doors, and Andrew reluctantly follows.

We approach the others, and I check the time on my watch. 6:58. Right on time.

Two smartly-dressed women emerge from the doors. “Parents, please bring me your children’s proper identification now,” one woman orders. I walk to the woman and give her Andrew’s scan-id.

“All children whose surnames begin with an A or B please make a line behind me,” the other woman states.

Andrew grabs my hand, his large green eyes staring up at me worriedly. Looking for assurance. “Go get in line, Andrew. I will be waiting for you when you return. You will be fine.” The words feel false on my tongue. I give Andrew’s hand a squeeze.

Andrew releases my hand and finds his place in the line of children. The woman guides them into the building, and the doors are closed behind them.

“Guardians, please follow me to the waiting area,” the woman says, leading me and the rest of the parents into the building. I take my seat in the large room, clasping my hands in my lap, since I again feel the alien urge to fidget.

I visualize what is happening to Andrew. He will be assigned a desk, handed a stylus and tablet, told to copy his name. It will be his first-time writing by hand. In school, all writing is done either through computer dictation or occasionally typing. Children are not allowed to write before the test, because it could mar the results. He will first write with his left hand, then with his right. The hand he prefers along with the slant of his letters determines whether he is a Right or Left. If he is right brained or left brained. If he is Left he will be given back to me, and begin his education.

He will begin his preparation to develop his natural intellectual skills to aid society. He will become a chemist, like me, or engineer, or doctor. If he is a Right...

If he is a Right he will be taken to a manual labor facility to live. He will be given a menial job, one that someone of no intelligence can do. This is what he will do for his entire life, with only his most basic needs cared for. He will never achieve anything. He will never find any fulfillment in his life. He will never marry or have children. He will never have any happiness.

Wetness falls onto my hands. Am, am I crying? I bring my fingers to my face, and they come back wet. I hastily wipe my tears. Oh, how I hope no one saw. The last thing I need is for someone to report me as Mentally Unstable.

I check my watch. It has been fifteen minutes. I spend the rest of the wait concentrating on my breathing, determined not to cry again. Although I know logically the minutes are taking the same amount of time as usual, it feels as if they are ticking by ever so slowly.

"Ms. Brown?"

I shoot out of my seat, and rush towards the man holding a tablet.

This is it. I will have the results. I will know my child's fate.

"Ms. Brown, I am disappointed to report that your child, Andrew, was identified to be a Right-"

The rest of the man's words are drowned out by a roaring in my ears. No. No! I will not lose him. He is kind. He is patient. He always tries hard. He is a good child. He is my child! He is my child!

"Where is he?"

"Oh, he is with the other Rights waiting to be deported. He is not your responsibility anymore."

"He is my son! He belongs with me! I'm taking him home!"

The man blinks. "Excuse me, Ms. Brown, I know that this kind of disappointing news can sometimes be a shock, but-"



Ignoring him, I spot a door for employees,  
and walk purposely towards it.

"Ms. Brown? Ms. Brown! Where do you think you are going?"

Flinging the door open, I hear the man call "Security!  
I believe I have a woman who is Mentally Unstable!  
She is entering the restricted area!"

I begin to run, dashing down the hall. "Andrew!  
Andrew!" I scream, calling for him.

Footsteps and shouting echo behind me, so I force my legs to  
move even faster. I have to find him! Coming up to a turn, I  
skid on the slick floor and slam into a wall. Looking up, I  
see a door marked "Rights." Here! He must be here!

As I reach for the knob the door opens, and a woman  
is leading out a tiny group of children.

Her mouth opens in shock at the sight of me,  
and the children begin to murmur.

"Momma!" Andrew screams, running for me.

"Andrew! Andrew!" I cry, grasping him in my arms.

"Come back here with the other Rights where you  
belong!" the woman calls to Andrew.

"You are not taking him. I am bringing him home!"

"Momma, Momma, you came! You came!"

"Of course, I did." I smile at him. My son. What does it  
matter if he isn't a perfect member of society? What does  
it matter if his brain is unserviceably artistic? He is good  
and kind. He is my world, and I will not let him go.

Hands grab my arms and jerk me back. Away from Andrew.

"What are you doing? Let me go! Let me go!" The  
woman ushers the children away.

“No! Momma! Don’t let them take me, Momma!” Andrew begs, fighting the security robot who drags him away.

I thrash against the robot holding me back, screaming after Andrew. They can’t take him! They can’t! They can’t!

“Stop! He’s just a child! Let him stay with me! I will take responsibility for him! What does it matter if he is uselessly artistic!?” I howl, continuing to struggle in the robot’s grip.

“Ms. Brown, calm down,” a man orders.

I can no longer see Andrew. I collapse, tears streaming down my face. There is no longer any point in fighting.

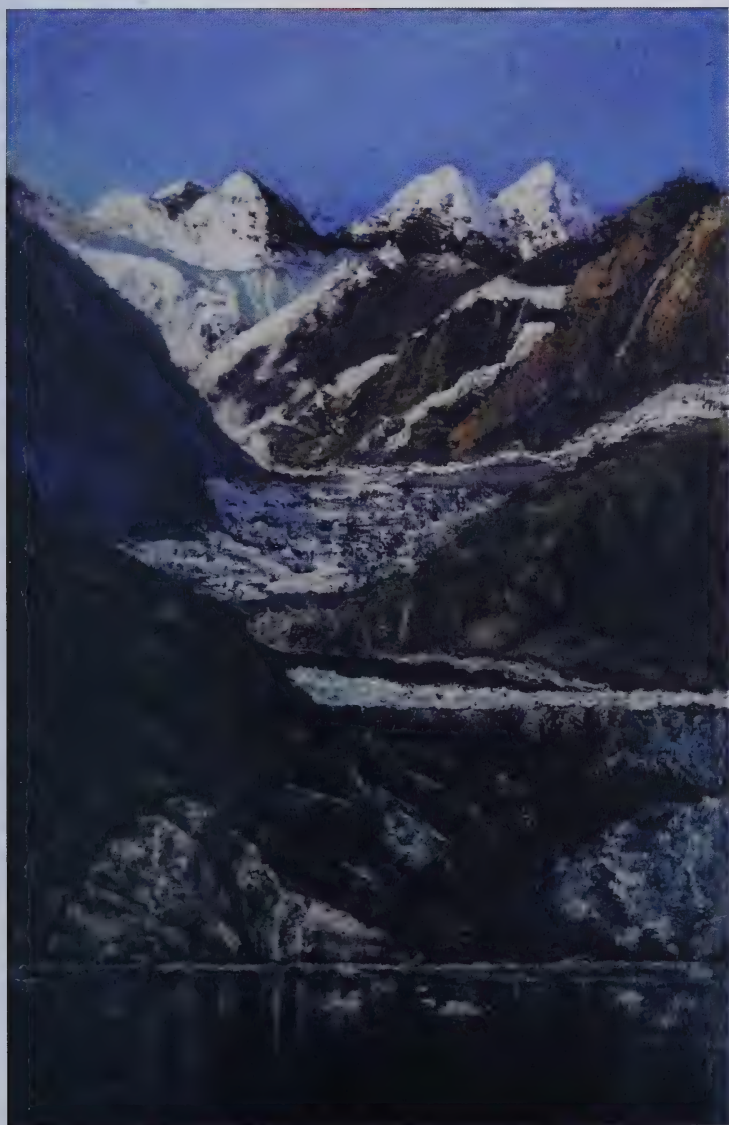
“Calm your mental state, Ms. Brown. Everything is going to be alright,” a man says.

I feel a sharp pinch, and my mind pieces together that the robot restraining me just injected a tranquilizer into me.

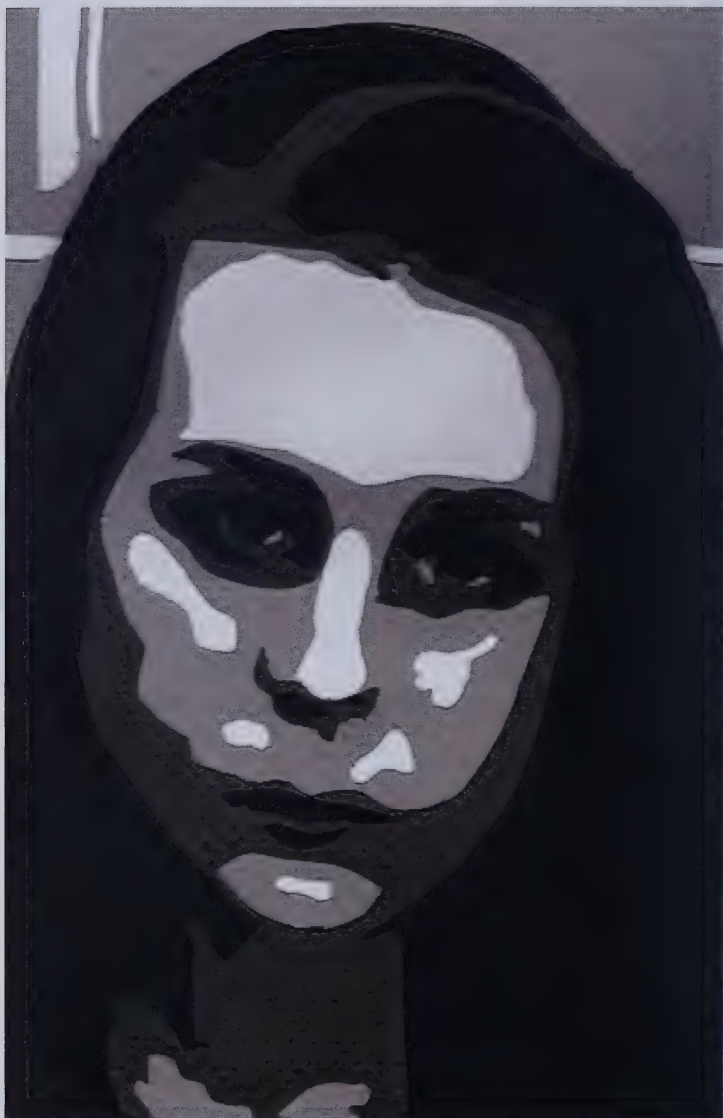
I slump, already feeling the drug course through my veins.

“My son...” I mumble as the robot carries me away.

My vision blurs and goes dark. My last thought is that I will never see my son again. He is doomed to be a worker, a slave for the rest of his life. Now that I am considered Mentally Unstable, I will be put to death. We are both useless to society.



*Alaska Memories II*  
Maritza Brunetto  
Coldwax



*LM*  
*Megan Hethcote*  
*Greyscale Construction Paper*



*Bass Lake Lilies*  
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